

BHANTE WIMALA

Compassion
In Action

LIVING BUDDHISM SERIES

Cover Photo:

The Outpatient Hospital wing complex in Tangalle, Sri Lanka that was built to cope with the overwhelming number of patients in the post-Tsunami period with funds from the Buddhist Maha Vihara Tsunami Relief Fund. The Vihara also helped to build an orphanage in Kampung Simpang, Aceh, Indonesia for the Tsunami orphans and rebuilt 2 Hindu temples destroyed in the Tsunami in Kalmunai, Sri Lanka.

Publication of the



Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society 佛陀教义弘扬协会

Buddhist Maha Vihara
123, Jalan Berhala, Brickfields
50470 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Tel: 603-22741141 Fax: 603-22732570
E-Mail: info@buddhistmahavihara.com
Website: www.buddhistmahavihara.com
www.ksridhammananda.com

Venerable Wimala's journey in compassion was compiled
and edited by Bro Sumanananda Premaseri

Permission to reprint for free distribution can be
obtained upon request.

Published for Free Distribution

1st Print – April 2004 (2000 copies)
2nd Print – August 2005 (3500 copies)
3rd Print – December 2006 (3500 copies)
4th Print – February 2008 (3500 copies)
5th Print – February 2009 (2500 copies)

Printed by Uniprints Marketing Sdn. Bhd. (493024-K)
(A member of Multimedia Printing & Graphics (M) Sdn Bhd)

ISBN: 978-983-2515-31-9

Foreword

“The value of a man should be in what he gives and not in what he is able to receive” – Allbert Einstein

“You must give some time to your fellow man. Even if it’s a little thing, do something for those who have need of help, something for which you get no pay but the privilege of doing it” – Albert Schweitzer

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others” – Mahatma Gandhi

“The most enthusiastic givers in life are the real lovers of life. They experience the soul-joy that comes from responding with the heart rather than the head” – Helen Steiner Rice

“How can we expect our children to know and experience the joy of giving unless we teach them that the greater pleasure in life lies in the art of giving rather than receiving” – James Cash Penney

“Giving pays the highest interest rate and has the longest term of any investment available” – Ven Dr K Sri Dhammananda

Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society is honoured to publish “Compassion in Action” highlighting the humanitarian works by a Sinhala Buddhist bhante in Africa. However the pages penned in this book do not do justice to the great work Venerable Wimala and a host of other Venerables are doing in Africa and other third world countries. We also hope that the book will encourage more Buddhists to go out there and make a difference in the lives of the underprivileged.

Committee of Management
Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society
February 2004

LOVE

When your mind becomes motionless
and the brilliant eyes
of the peaceful mind
takes a straight look
down into the depth
of your heart
you will see the life-force
pulsating and thriving
in the warmth of pure love.

As you experience this pure love
what we all call "heart"
beams of light
will begin to radiate
from the center of it
for heaven is there
in eternity.

If you can release
this radiance of love
and allow it to flow through you
your heart will become light
and the spirit will get liberated
into the air
and then,
from a place of inner stillness
you will know
what it would be like
to be an eagle
and soar in the evening skies.

And most of all
you would understand
what it would be like

Little Things That Make A Big Difference

I would like to begin my sharing with you by dwelling on the opportunity of the simple things we could do in our daily lives to make a difference in the lives of someone else. In our daily life we often carefully plan and organize the things that we want to do and we should also slot in time to help others. But we should always keep some space open in our hearts also to do spontaneous acts of compassion. Such spontaneous and simple acts of compassion at times can change the life of another person forever. They could often touch the person who does the giving as deeply as the person who benefits from it. I would like to share a personal experience of mine with you. Hopefully it will inspire you to keep your mind receptive and heart open to help somebody in an unexpected moment.

Sila Hendric lives in a small village called Gunnepena near Kandy, Sri Lanka. She had adopted a handicapped girl over 35 years ago and continues to take care of her. It has been two years since she lost her job and both women are barely able to survive.

When we sat in the narrow living room of her small house, they were overjoyed at my unexpected visit. She said, "Today our hearts are full. It is as if the Buddha came to our house." Over a cup of hot water I talked with these two innocent women about their lives and could feel their beautiful spirit.

Sila used to live with her parents and took care of them until they both died. She had a job in the weaving mill. The company gave her a small amount of money when she was laid off about two years ago. A relative who knew about the money, borrowed it, promising to give it back. She never heard from him again.

As these two women struggled to take care of each other, they were often harassed by some men whom I would not like to speak of. I listened to the story of their struggle for survival, only occasionally asking some questions. I felt that more than listening to me they needed to talk. The

flickering flame of the oil lamp cast a shadow on their faces, revealing a much deeper side of their painful struggle.

I understood that if I could help them get electricity to their house it could solve many problems that they were having. They could have outside lights so that they could turn them on from the inside and therefore not live in fear. The most important thing is that they would feel safe at night. On rainy days, they could heat water or cook without having to worry about firewood. Many other benefits of electricity would lessen the burden that they carry.

By the time I left their home it was about 9pm. As the engine of my car broke the silence of the night I turned and looked back. Holding the oil lamp they both stood outside the door. I saw them trying to secure the flame from getting blown out by the wind. From the distance I could not see their faces. I wished that the wind would not blow out the flame before they enter the house. I felt sorry about leaving them in darkness.

The next day, I called my oldest sister. I explained the situation and asked her to act immediately to provide them with electricity. I gave specific instructions on how to wire the house for outside lamps around the little house, inside switches and so on. My sister, whom I could always trust, took over the project and finished it within a month. Of course, I paid all the bills.

In one of my subsequent visits to Sri Lanka I went to see these two women again. It was unbelievable how much difference getting electricity has made in their lives. They have never been happier and healthier.

With both hands on their chest, to show their gratitude, time and again they expressed this wish, "May you achieve enlightenment with the power of this noble deed." That is the highest wish a Buddhist could make. They described to me how they could sleep through the night without fear and worry. Many other benefits of electricity have taken away so much unnecessary suffering and pain out of their lives. When I spontaneously acted on my feelings and decided to help them I never imagined that my

simple act of compassion could make such enormous difference in their lives. I felt their happiness and it became part of my happiness.

Sila said, "Don't you see that we are much healthier and happier now and that your help has changed our lives?." Of course, I made a joke, "Now you know how those multi vitamin pills I gave you can change your whole life. Don't stop taking them." It was wonderful to hear their laughter.

The echo of that laughter will stay with me for a long time. The clear memory of it will continue to inspire me to do many more little things that will make a big difference in the lives of our fellow human beings.

Gift of Sight – Gift of Light

Of the many projects completed in 2002, one of the most satisfying was the Cataract Eye Operations Project in East Africa. While in Nairobi over a year ago, I spoke with several physicians and learned the seriousness of the eye problems in Africa. In fact, blindness in Africa increases at the rate of two million people per year. Doctors believe that 75% of these cases are avoidable and easily treatable. Unfortunately, there is less than one eye doctor available per million African people. So most people in need will never receive treatment.

After my initial investigations, I found that the Lions Sightfirst Hospital in Nairobi had a wonderful outreach program specially equipped to conduct cataract operations. Discussions with the chief surgeon inspired me greatly. I decided to get involved in helping their efforts to eradicate blindness. I came back to the States with an open mind and discussed the situation with some close friends and students. Their positive responses made it possible for us to fund 135 cataract operations this year.

In my four visits to Africa in 2002, I devoted special time to participate in outreach "eye camps" in rural Kenya. In one of these "camps" about 450 people arrived for screening. The team from Lions Eye Clinic examined the people from morning until evening. Some of these people were so poor that they were unable even to pay for the bus fare. People of all ages

walked for miles just to reach the eye clinic.

Although all patients seen were to receive treatment by the physicians, the doctor explained that only 10% of the people would qualify for cataract operations. I observed the eye exams and learned that cataracts are a condition in which the natural lens of the eye becomes cloudy, causing blurred and distorted vision. Over time, if left untreated, this causes needless blindness.

Once the patients diagnosed with cataracts were selected, they were immediately driven to Nairobi to be prepared for surgery the following day. After a night hospital stay, the patients would be sent home with their vision restored. Our sponsorship covered the entire cost of transportation, operation and hospital stay.



The process of screening the blind for cataract operations and subsequently sponsoring the transportation, operations, hospital stay, medicines and post-care checkups is a great service conducted by the Triple Gem Society, USA.

As with all the projects we sponsor, I enjoyed actively participating in the entire process from the rural village eye camps, to viewing the actual

surgery in the operations theater, to discussions with the patients in recovery. For a few of the cases, the doctors invited me to observe the actual eye surgery. When I explained that I could not take off my robes, they were kind enough to allow me to wear my surgical gown on top of the robes, a highly unusual exception!

I was amazed that the entire operation took only 10 minutes. I noticed how a small lens was inserted after removal of the cataract. It was hard to believe that a blind person's sight could be restored in so short a time. Can you imagine opening your eyes for the first time and seeing this world? I was so fortunate to share this experience of joy, laughter and gratitude with these special people. By directly being in touch with those we help, we can come closer to their pain and suffering, understand it better, allowing them to inspire compassion within us.

Donating a Fundus Camera

As part of our ongoing contributions to the eye care specialists at the Lions Sightfirst Hospital in Nairobi, we were able to donate a fundus camera this Fall. Prior to our donation, there were only three of these specialized machines in all of Kenya.

A fundus camera is used in the diagnosis and treatment of eye disorders such as diabetic retinopathy. The camera takes photos of the back of the eye, or retina. Comparison of photos over time can be used to track changes or disease progression and to evaluate treatment options. This equipment could be instrumental in treating eye disease and preventing blindness.

The fundus camera could cost as much as USD 14,000 brand new. Fortunately our efforts through medical contacts in the United States allowed us to purchase this equipment at a considerable discount. Thanks to the generosity of Mombassa Bed Canopies and other kindhearted contributors this valuable piece of eye equipment is already in use in Africa.

Wheelchair Project

In 2002 we were able to distribute 50 wheelchairs to disabled people in several remote regions of Kenya.

The inspiration for the wheelchair project came as I was visiting the Spinal Cord Injuries Hospital in Nairobi some time ago. This hospital provides medical care and rehabilitation services for people who have sustained paralyzing spinal cord injuries. We were providing wheelchairs to two



Almost 10% of the population is disabled in districts like Machakos, Kenya due to malnutrition, diseases, poor healthcare and other difficulties. Thousands of severely crippled people in Kenya are without wheelchairs.

young men waiting to return home. After talking to these patients and their social workers, I realized that there is a great need for wheelchairs. Many patients are stranded in the hospital, unable to return home due to lack of simple transportation equipment. Apparently, in Kenya thousands of severely crippled people are without wheelchairs. The government in Kenya does not provide free health care nor any medical equipment.

The Rotary Club of Nairobi had a long list of requests, but could provide only a few wheelchairs per month. My further inquiries led me to understand the serious nature of the disabled people and their unnecessary suffering. In some places we went, for example a district called a Machakos, due to malnutrition, disease or other difficulties, 10% of the population is disabled. Since the government does not provide much assistance, these innocent people solely depend on humanitarian organizations to support them.

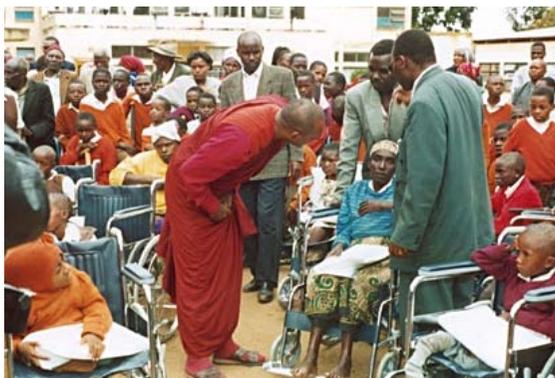


Providing wheelchairs help to give mobility, dignity and independence to many such handicapped people, who without such aid would be crawling for the rest of their lives. The devotees of the Buddhist Maha Vihara Brickfields have donated more than 300 wheelchairs since 2005 to Africa through Ven Wimala.

As we went to distribute wheelchairs, every gathering had three times more disabled people than available wheelchairs. In talking to the people, I found out some had crawled for miles to the distribution site. It was heartbreaking to see people crawling away and mothers carrying disabled children back home without a wheelchair. To my surprise, those who did not get a wheelchair did not complain. Some crawled away saying “maybe next time.” Their skinny callused legs and sad faces filled with pain inspired me to work harder and do more to help these innocent people. It

gave me great joy to participate in making a difference in their lives. I would like to share that joy with the sponsors and supporters of this project.

Because of the severity of the disabilities and the desperate need for wheelchairs, we are now working on obtaining a container of chairs from China. This will make it possible to cut the current cost by 50%. Niven of Mombassa Bed Canopies has gathered information for this project in one of his recent visits to China. We are working on preparing the shipment of several hundred wheelchairs by the summer. In Kenya one of the generous contributors to our project has provided the storage space and promised to oversee the customs clearance and safety of the equipment. We have also commenced giving out crutches to the disabled groups in Africa.



Well managed co-sharing aid stretches the aid dollar and reduces elements of dependency on others for lifelong handouts while stimulating dignity and independence. It creates responsibility on both the donor and recipients, invests in long term self-development and care. Giving wheelchairs and scholarships to crippled students keeps them in school so that they do not become a greater burden when they are older to their parents, but capable of being productive to the community.

Helping the disabled in Kenya

In my travels to rural Kenya, I participated in donating more wheelchairs, crutches, and prosthetic limbs to children in outlying villages. I also sponsored additional cataract operations as part of our ongoing involvement with the rural eye clinics.

Although we have donated prosthetic limbs to victims of war in Sri Lanka in the past, this is the first time we have donated prostheses on the African Continent. In earlier visits, I had noticed the need for these devices and got a request list from the rehabilitation centers in the remote district of Makuvani. These children, disabled for various reasons, either had no such devices or were using primitive, locally made braces to walk. Meeting these children was a very moving experience as I witnessed their daily pain and struggle. How little it takes to relieve them of suffering and give them hope. I am so grateful to all the generous supporters of our humanitarian projects.

A home for the youngest victims of genocide in Rwanda

Accepting an invitation from individuals conducting humanitarian projects in Rwanda, I spent three days in the capital, Kigali, visiting many hospitals, rehabilitation centers, AIDS orphanages and homeless shelters in the surrounding towns and villages.

The 1994 genocide of close to one million people in this tiny country has created severe and long standing problems. It has left behind several thousand orphaned children who have found only shelter under the sky. These orphans, commonly known as street children are babies born at the time of the massacre who have grown up in the streets under conditions unhealthy for them as well as their society.

With little food, scanty clothes, no education and constant exposure to life on the streets, the future of these children seem bleak and hopeless. Considered a nuisance by society, many of them have resorted to

intoxicating glue and stealing to survive. Although the government is now making an effort to take care of these children, many still remain on the streets.

My host family on this trip, who owns the SULFA Rwanda Corporation, has also made an effort to provide basic needs for these children. They have started a shelter which provides food, clothing and education for a small number of these children. During my visit I heard that despite these efforts there are many more children who need assistance. The existing facilities are simply inadequate to provide for their needs.

As I met these beautiful children struggling to change their lives, I was inspired to help them. I decided to begin a project to build a home to shelter 30 of these street children. The project is now underway. The architect and engineers involved with the project have promised me completion of the building before my next visit to Rwanda. Of course, whatever support you can provide us will be greatly appreciated. We do need your help.

Welfare projects in South Africa

The final segment of my recent African trip brought me to South Africa. I was invited by a South African gentleman named Spidey who lives in Key West, Florida. He was making a documentary in Durban to help generate support for the needy.

As part of our tour, we visited Saint Mary's Hospital in Mariannhill. This facility is located in an impoverished area serving the local communities. The hospital itself is in great need of assistance, as it is poorly funded due to lack of resources and inadequate income. After touring the hospital, a very difficult experience, I had a long conversation with one of the hospital administrators.

At this site, over 500 babies are born per month. Over 50% are born with HIV or full-blown Aids. The majority of these children will die within their

first three years of life. You can imagine rows and rows of infant cribs holding sick or dying children. As I entered into some of the rooms, I was overwhelmed by the sight, sound and smell of the whole environment. A nurse described to me that the entire life expectancy of these children is most often spent inside this ward. Clearly there is so much we can do to help this hospital and the lives of those who suffer.

One important need that could be fulfilled without costing us too much is to provide computers to the hospital wards for more efficient recordkeeping and patient maintenance. Triple Gem Society has already collected several new and used computers for donation. We are planning to send out a container which will include computers and other necessary medical equipment. If you are interested in helping us, please contact the Triple Gem Society.

Malaria prevention project

Malaria is a life-threatening illness transmitted from one person to another through the bite of the female *Anopheles* mosquito. It is one of the greatest public health challenges preventing economic development in the poorest countries of the world.

Although more than one million malaria-related deaths occur worldwide each year, 90% of these are in Africa. Across this continent, malaria causes at least 300 million cases of acute illness every year and is the leading cause of death in young children. Among adults, pregnant women are at greatest risk.

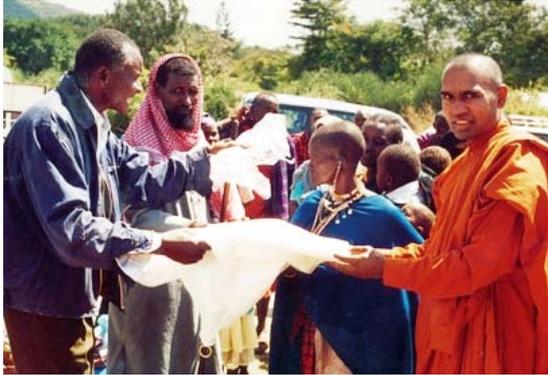
Sadly, in spite of worldwide efforts, malaria kills more people today than it did three decades ago. This is mainly due to the cost of maintaining long-term programs and the development of resistance to insecticides and treatment drugs. Reports in local newspaper describe the African anti-malaria campaign as focusing on free treatment and better medication supplies. To eradicate this epidemic however, more prevention and early detection projects are badly needed.

Because of my understanding of the seriousness of the disease, I have been involved with malaria prevention projects for the past three years. Up until this year, we had distributed over 2000 mosquito nets in the rural malaria-ridden villages of Sri Lanka. Dr. Latha Hapugoda of the Ministry of Health of Sri Lanka discussed this matter with me and provided a list of rural villages that need nets. Mothers with young children or babies were the ones who needed them the most. We distributed them to Orphanages, hospitals, mothers with little children, babies and old folk homes.

When the need for mosquito nets were informed, we contacted Pejuta Hillman of Key West Florida. He has a mosquito net business. His company based in Texas is called Mombasa Bed Canopies. Mr. Hillman, Mr. Niven and Mr. Blue of Mombasa Bed Canopies Company provided all the nets the last two years for free and paid even the shipping cost to get the nets to Sri Lanka. They also have committed to provide at least a thousand nets each year to continue our project to help prevent Malaria and save lives of many innocent people.

On one of my visits to Africa last year, I read some newspaper articles describing the rising death toll due to malaria infection. As I am at liberty to distribute these nets as needed, I decided to extend our project to Africa. With all the generous support of well-wishers and the dedicated efforts of two very special people, Raj & Smritha Pandit, we distributed 600 nets this year in Africa.

As I visited some of the hospitals in Kenya, I saw many babies suffering with serious effects of malaria. My deep concern for these children gave me the courage to travel into some of the most difficult and risky rural regions to make sure the nets were received by those in greatest need. Working with the African Medical Relief Foundation and my own personal contacts, we organized the distribution of nets to pregnant women, mothers of small children, and the disabled in the most severely affected areas of Kenya. Often we would load the nets into our 4-wheel drive vehicles and travel into the remote countryside where people gathered at locally organized central sites.



One million people die yearly due to malaria, 90% of them in Africa. At least 300 million cases of acute illness occur every year across the continent and is the leading cause of death in young children. Among adults, pregnant women are at greatest risk. As part of the malaria prevention project, thousands of mosquito nets are distributed to women and children.

Although most of the people there were well aware that the mosquito nets could save their children's lives, they were too poor to afford even one net. While it was painful to witness the condition and suffering of these people, we walked away with the satisfaction and joy of the knowledge that we may have saved some lives and given these children a chance to grow and live healthy lives.

Malaria Testing Kits

When I was in Cameroon I became very sick with symptoms similar to malaria. Since I did not have access to a testing facility, to be safe I was treated with anti-malaria drugs. Later on, when I arrived in a city and was tested, I found out that I did not have malaria.

The drug that was given to me with the suspicion that I had malaria however, made me very sick. As I was traveling through remote rural

where there were no hospitals or medical facilities, I heard stories of how children are treated with these same malaria medications at the first sign of a fever. Because of their personal experience of the suffering and terrible effects of malaria, these people would not hesitate to take malaria pills whether they had malaria or not. Since I know the painful effects of this treatment firsthand, I investigated other possibilities for early malaria diagnosis. I discovered that simple malaria testing kits are readily available at very little cost. Again, their extreme poverty does not allow these people to benefit from these products. This situation inspired me to specifically work on supplying malaria detection kits to orphanages and remote villages as part of our ongoing projects. In my future visits I will pay special attention to expanding this service.



Parents in rural Africa cannot afford the malaria testing kits due to abject poverty. Doctors are forced to administer malaria pills at the first sign of a fever, even to children with fever instead of testing for malaria, thus causing great bodily pain and suffering to the child. Providing the malaria testing kits help the doctors, the patients and their parents to administer the correct drugs.

Visionary Woman

Leelawathi Menike may look small but she has a big and visionary heart. She grew up in a small village in Sri Lanka. She worked all her life as a school teacher and was never married. She often visited an old age

in a nearby town. In one of her visits she fed the old people and spent the day providing the care they needed. On that day a thought came to her mind that it would be wonderful if there is a home for women. She had a vacant piece of land, the only valuable possession she had. She thought of building an old age home for women in that land.

Leelawathi Menike had no savings and many had thought that she had an impossible dream. Yet she was not discouraged by the negative comments of people of the village. Thinking and working on her vision day and night she came up with a plan to build a 30- bed home for women. Because of her dedication and hard work, she has completed the home. It is currently occupied by old women who have no families.



Leelawathi Menike may be small built but she is certainly not small in her vision, determination and perseverance. She built the impossible dream of a 30-bed home for women who have no families on a vacant piece of land, the only valuable possession she had. Bhante Wimala helped to equip the home with basic amenities.

When a friend contacted me asking to help the project, I went to visit the village and met Leelawathi Menike. There I was with a woman who had nothing but a clear vision of completing a huge project that many would

think is an impossible task. She said "Women like me who had no family need a community to live a peaceful and religious life".

"What an extra ordinary woman" I thought to myself. After touring the building site the next thing that needed to be done was obvious. I made arrangements to provide all the money needed to build toilets, showers, septic tanks, a water tower, an electric water pump and the water tank for the home. I appointed two volunteers to supervise and manage the project. I would like to thank Amitha Peris and Asubodha Siriwardana of Colombo, Sri Lanka who dedicated time there until the completion of the project.

Pain of War and Joy of Sharing

When a teenage girl sang a song about the war and how she lost her father, most of us could not hold our tears. It was a moment that we all shared her pain of losing her father and the pain of many other children who are like her.

As I vaguely recalled the meaning of it, she sang about the sounds of the guns, horrifying screams of people and silent dead bodies. She sang how the terrorists had stolen the life of her father and she and her mother had become victims of the war.

I felt that the wounds of war will scar the spirits of these children forever. I met about 5 of such children and their mothers. As the sadness fades away there is so much space in your heart for the joy of helping these mothers and children. I was very happy that I was there with them.

I was there to give 50 scholarships to 50 fatherless children. Fifty single mothers and their children, ages ranging from 2-14, had come from all over Sri Lanka to receive the scholarships. Our intention is to support these children until they sit for advanced level exams to qualify for the university. Most of them come from poor families.



Providing scholarships to orphans of war invests into the future of a society as it helps to educate these children and keep them in school instead of becoming street children that are exposed to various malaises in society and then exploited for evil ends such as child prostitution, drug peddling, vandalism, etc

I felt privileged to be there. I felt a great joy as I handed over the first check and a package of school needs for them and saw the spark of hope in the eyes of the mothers and these children. As these children received the scholarships one by one, I felt gratitude and sincere thanks to the generous sponsors. Thank you for your commitment to brighten up the future of these fatherless children.

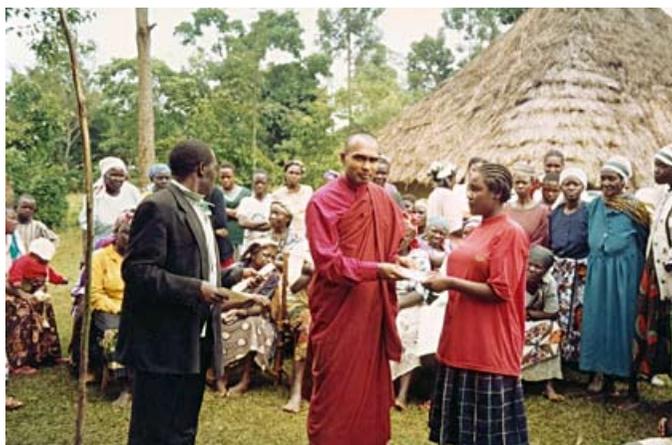
In February 1994 when I was in Sri Lanka, I saw the pain, suffering and terror caused by the war. I felt that I should do something to at least lift a bit of the pain and suffering of the victims of war. The scars of war will never fade away but at least now I can do something to heal the wounds.

After talking to several volunteer organizations who help the victims of war, I chose "RANAVIRU DUDARU REKAVARANAYA". They are helping the children of the victims of war by giving them scholarships. There are several good reasons for me to choose that organization. The first 100% of the money will go to support the children. No administrative cost is deducted. The fund is managed by volunteers. This organization helps children and their single mothers. The patron of the organization is VEN.

When I returned to the US I got on the phone, called all my friends and students, faxed information and asked them to help the children. The response was very positive and encouraging.

I promised the sponsors that I would hand over the scholarships with my own hand and meet all the mothers and children. I told the trustees of the fund that I would personally guarantee every scholarship up to 4 years. This means that if somebody drops out due to financial difficulties, I will find another sponsor to replace him or her.

On the first of August 1994, I returned to Sri Lanka and fulfilled that promise. Most of the mothers and children came to Colombo and only a few could not make it there because it was too far and too expensive for them to get to Colombo.



In many poor African communities, parents who cannot afford to send their children to school will hold back their female children giving schooling priority to their male siblings. Providing scholarships for girls keeps them in school.

I appreciate the hard work of Volunteers of R.D.R. and sincerely thank them for making it possible for us to support those children.

Triple Gem Society Prison Sangha Ministries

The seeds for the Triple Gem Society prison dhamma work in the US were first planted by me in October 1998 with my involvement in the Prison Welfare Committee at the Welikada Women's Prison in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Our prison project focused on the construction and retro-fitting of an infant care center exclusively for female inmates and their children. Over the next two years, with the help of friends and contributions from the Triple Gem Society, the project was completed and the clinic equipped with beds, medical equipment and supplies.

I also listened for hours to women jailed in prisons listening to their stories and grievances. This prison capacity was to hold 160 inmates but instead was holding 475 inmates. Most of these women were imprisoned for petty crimes like selling illicit liquor, drugs, petty theft, etc mainly due to having two or more children and the husband having left them. I have started a small nursery for their children and built proper toilets.

I went many times to the prison to release many women prisoners by paying their fines as they were too poor to pay small fines for petty crimes. They are not necessarily criminals as their crimes are due to necessity. The imprisonment of these women are injustice and cruelty in the name of justice.

In late 1999, I visited a U.S. state prison in Pennsylvania. I was the first Buddhist monk to ever set foot inside a Pennsylvania state prison. With the help of my student Sivali, I established a regular Buddhist sangha for the inmates and thus began the prison sangha ministries associated with the Triple Gem Society.

The first sangha ministry at Mahanoy State Prison became a model for Buddhist prison programs for the state Department of Corrections. As a result, a number of Buddhist inmates from other state prisons have asked the Triple Gem Society for help in bringing the Buddhist sangha to their prisons.

Since the outset of the prison dhamma work initiated, a regular sangha is now in place at Mahanoy State Prison and plans for sangha ministries at Somerset, Greensburg and Cresson State prisons are in the process of formation. The Triple Gem Society has provided Buddhist service to inmates at the Federal Prison, Philadelphia; and corresponds with a number of other Buddhist inmates in association with the Prison Dharma Network and the Buddhist Peace Fellowship.

The Buddha once said: "There are people among us who do not have the same capacity as we do. They do not have the capacity to act rightly or to speak rightly. But if we look deeply, we see in their hearts that there are good seeds, and therefore we have to treat those people in such a way that those good seeds will not be lost."

A prison sangha is a community of inmates practicing the dhamma together in order to bring about and to maintain awareness. The essence of a sangha is awareness, understanding, acceptance, harmony and love. Prisoners are uprooted from their families and their communities; they wander around, not quite treated like human beings. Many inmates feel rejected by family, friends and the community. They live on the margins of prison life without a home or anyone or anything to belong to.

Loneliness, the feeling of being cut off, alienation, division, the disintegration of the family unit and the disintegration of life itself are their daily companions. Without the sangha, without the support of a group of friends who are motivated by the same ideal and practice, no one in prison life can make much progress on the path to liberation and transformation. As a community of practice, a prison sangha can provide a second

chance. A sangha can be a place for prisoners to practice transformation and healing of self where they can be transported like on a boat across the ocean of Samsara (sorrow).

The role that the sangha plays in prison life is one of support, protection and nourishment. The good seeds that the Buddha refers to are in the elements of mindfulness, concentration and insight. Those seeds are always there in everyone. If there is a sangha that can help prisoners touch those seeds and help them grow, then they will have the best kind of refuge for the support, protection and nourishment of those seeds.

The services and programs of a prison sangha will focus on the central teachings and practices of Buddhism, with emphasis on meditation techniques and practices. The duration is two to three hours, usually on a weekly basis. The prison facility will need to schedule the chapel or some other quiet place for use, and provide a portable cassette/CD player for chanting and listening to talks.

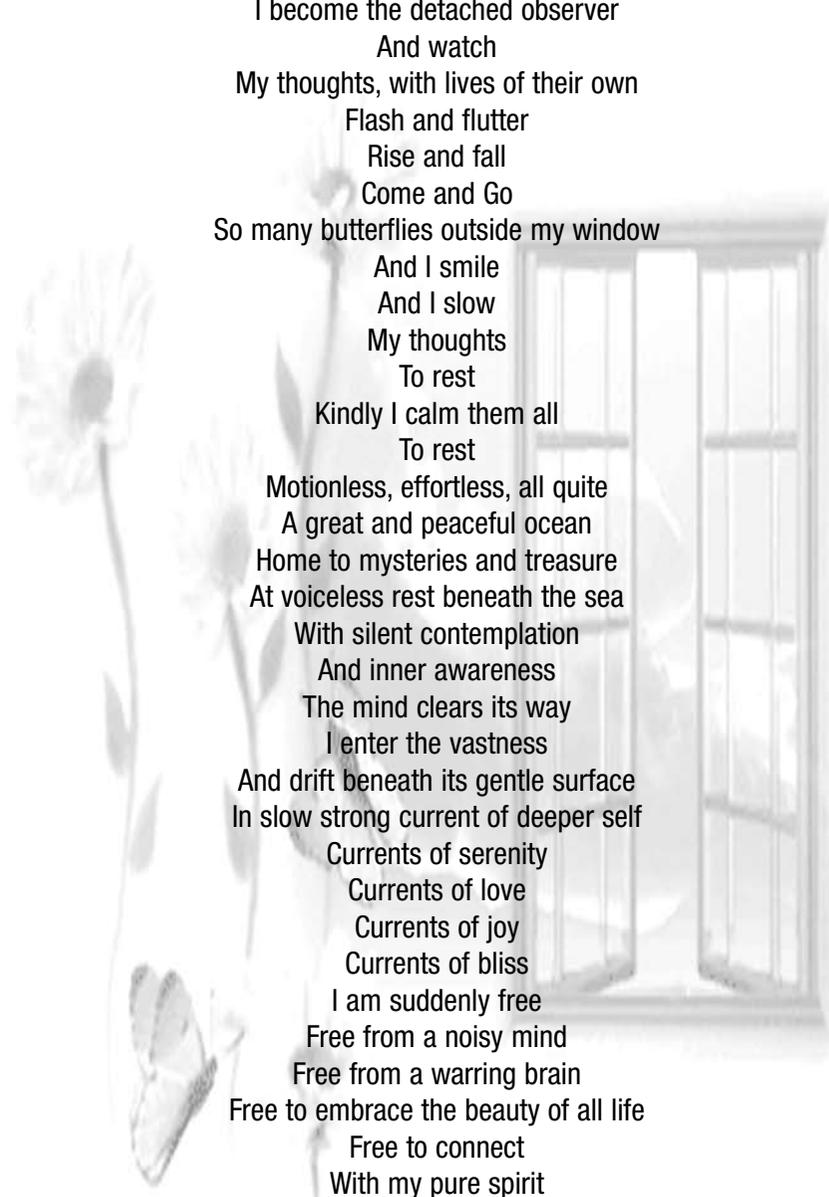
A clearance request form must be filed with the prison prior to admission. Clearances are also required in order to bring educational materials, books and other materials used for the sessions such as meditation cushion, meditation bell, Buddha statue, candles, incense, matches or lighter. All materials taken into the prison must be approved by a prison administrator or program director. Prison facilities usually allow for guests and visitors such as monks, nuns and lay people to accompany the sangha leader for special events and ceremonies.

A prison sangha program may consist of the following:

- Opening prayers and chants - taking Refuge in the Noble Triple Gem and the observance of the Five Precepts
- Relaxation, yoga or breathing exercises
- Introduction of a Buddhist topic - some teachings of the Buddha
- Questions and answers on teachings of the Buddha
- Introduction to meditation practices and techniques
- Meditation period - at least thirty minutes in length
- Feedback on meditation practices and problems
- Short period for socializing and personal questions
- Closing bow to the Noble Triple Gem

Particulars of volunteers are normally requested for clearance such as name, address, previous names, telephone numbers, social security number, date of birth, place of birth, sex, race, height, weight, color eyes/hair, drivers' license number and state. Clearance is not given if anyone is on the visitor list or related to any inmate in that particular prison. **For more information**, please contact the Triple Gem Society or call Sivali at (717) 359-5281

INVITING SILENCE

A faint, artistic background illustration. On the right, a window with multiple panes is visible. To the left of the window, there are several flowers on stems, including a prominent daisy-like flower. A butterfly is shown in flight near the bottom left of the window area. The overall style is soft and ethereal, with light colors and a sense of depth.

I become the detached observer
And watch
My thoughts, with lives of their own
Flash and flutter
Rise and fall
Come and Go
So many butterflies outside my window
And I smile
And I slow
My thoughts
To rest
Kindly I calm them all
To rest
Motionless, effortless, all quite
A great and peaceful ocean
Home to mysteries and treasure
At voiceless rest beneath the sea
With silent contemplation
And inner awareness
The mind clears its way
I enter the vastness
And drift beneath its gentle surface
In slow strong current of deeper self
Currents of serenity
Currents of love
Currents of joy
Currents of bliss
I am suddenly free
Free from a noisy mind
Free from a warring brain
Free to embrace the beauty of all life
Free to connect
With my pure spirit
To know only peace and kindness

A moment of eternal freedom
Liberated by mind
The deepest part of me
Emerges from within
And with the small and subtle gentle touches
Silence speaks to me

Helping AIDS Victims in Africa

According to the Joint UN Program on AIDS, by the beginning of 2003, there will be 42 million people in the world living with HIV or AIDS. Within approximately 10 years we can expect another 45 million people to get infected. In Africa alone, about 55 million people could die over the next two decades if they do not get treatment. Asia, which contains over half of the world's population is on the verge of becoming the world's largest AIDS epidemic.

Each time I visit Africa I notice enormous pain and suffering caused by the devastating effects of the AIDS virus. Although we might easily get confused where to begin or feel helpless when we think of the magnitude of the problem, we all need to remain positive and should do what we can to help them. Even if it is making a difference in the life of one person, we should remain focus on that person rather than getting lost in this enormous problem.

In the beginning of this year among the several countries in Africa in my itinerary was Zambia. My short visit was filled with appointments and visits to orphanages and hospices. Where ever you go you find sadness, pain and suffering caused by deaths from AIDS. The deaths of men and women has also caused the problem of homeless children and orphans.

When I visited Kasisi in remote Kenya, I was truly impressed by the hard work and the commitment to service of one extraordinary woman from Great Britain who cared for about 90 children under extremely difficult circumstances. Among the thousands of children who are homeless and

lost their parents to AIDS, at least 90 were given care and shelter by her. It gave my heart a little comfort. I was glad to participate in her compassionate work by providing meals for two days for the staff and the children. But at times, the sense of helplessness by the enormity of the problem could be very unsettling.

A Christian sister coming to me says "Getting any thing done here is hard and difficult". At another center, the director with sadness and a sense of frustration said "So many people are coming to us everyday and we turn them back. We do not know what to do and we feel bad about that. But what can we do?" They are nevertheless constantly thinking of ways to help more people to die with care and dignity. Outside Lusaka, the capital of Zambia in small towns and villages AIDS has caused so much suffering but again they have the same problem of lack of medical facilities and care centers.

In Lusaka, a group of Sri Lankan Buddhists are working with Christian missionaries on several projects to help the needy by building a new dispensary, school and orphanage for these victims.

Our center was able to raise donations to build a dispensary and to provide the orphanages with mosquito nets, clothing, malaria testing kits, cooking stoves and two sewing machines. Among the many people I meet in my travels, I meet a few extra ordinary people who serve humanity quietly and selflessly. One such person who I admire from my heart is Anura Perera, a Sri Lankan Buddhist who lives in Cyprus. His humble and quiet work has brought relief to thousands of children. Among the many things that he has done in Africa, such as Kenya is the building of a home for 150 destitute babies who have been abandoned by their mothers or lost their parents to AIDS. Another such project includes a 100-bed orphanage to rehabilitate and educate street children. He has also built a 30-bed premise for babies with AIDS and a home for 60 children who has no parents. He has even built a home for Christian nuns in Kenya.

He is always planning the next project to help the more needy and sick.

truly admire and am happy to be friends with such kind-hearted people who serve humanity, especially women and children in this world stepping beyond cultural, social, national and religious boundaries. I would like to wish him good-health and inner peace. When we put our compassion into action, we get a special kind of happiness that we do not get from anywhere or anybody else. Our own acts of kindness nurture us and give us a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction and bring much meaning to our lives. To know the power of nurturing qualities of our hearts we need to express them in our actions. Let us take time to think of those who are less fortunate, sick and dying and share our love and prayers with them. Most importantly do whatever little we can to make a difference in their lives.

DEEP MOMENT OF SELF-REFLECTION

In a natural setting
of deep aesthetic beauty
sitting on a little rock
I feel the freshness of my mind.

Quiet and peaceful
sensitive and alert
the mind that I am with now
in this deep moment of self-reflection.

Another new found moment
and experience of higher form
of finer quality of consciousness
which one more time
takes me on a journey
to have a quick glance
at the beautiful sanctuary
of my inner world.

The Power of Words

Our ability to speak is a great blessing, as it makes it possible for us to communicate. Just like our thoughts, our words have energy; they have ability to soothe or hurt another person. Our words can make people feel happy or unhappy. Words can reveal the truth or disguise it. A blessing is a word spoken with good intention, while a curse is a word spoken with bad intention. When words are spoken with heart-felt, pure intention, we are practicing a spiritual virtue, the virtue of harmonious speech.

When we hear or read the words of great masters and true spiritual teachers, they not only broaden our life perspective, they also bring us comfort. Some of these words have inspired millions of people throughout history. Those who are spiritually rich utter no empty words. For them, words are a tool to express and share the riches of their hearts.

We have all had the experience of receiving a hateful or a loving word. Words can separate nations and lead them into war, or they can bring them together and create peace. In large or small ways, words that are spoken and heard by ordinary people like you and I affect our lives and those around us.

A mother's love expressed in a song can put a child to sleep. An angry husband's words can hurt his wife more than a sharp knife. Schools of business and management teach how to communicate with the appropriate words to increase employee motivation and productivity. By choosing the appropriate words that arise from good intentions, we can avoid causing other people pain. The awareness that the words we speak have consequences can encourage us to do our best not to cause disturbance or burden to anybody. This realization can be a great motivator on our spiritual path.

When people are angry or selfish and speak harsh words to us, we have to make a choice. That is when our motivation is challenged the most. Are we going to get drawn into their weakness and behave as they do, or

choose to act from a place of peace and strength? To act from a place of peace and strength is to choose not to match bad words with bad words: to stop creating a cycle of abusive verbal dialogue. Ask yourself if you have to get lost in anger and insult to get your point across.

We are all struggling with so many issues on a daily basis. When people get trapped in negative emotions they can become verbally abusive and unpleasant. You can easily answer back in the same tone, choosing to punish them with worse words. But the more difficult choice you could make is to respond with the opportunity, words that will carry the energy of your heart. We come across too many people in our daily lives who need a little healing or a moment to breathe. Your words could be a gift to them that offers a moment of peace, healing and acceptance. As you walk away from them your patient words and tolerance may leave them with a gentle reminder that they need to pay more attention to their own words.

To support this process, do your best to avoid absorbing words that create disharmony, violence, and aggression in your environment. Movies, books, radio and television all play their part in spreading violent speech and actions.

Prolonged exposure will inevitably have an effect on your consciousness. So again, it is our responsibility when we have the choice, to choose to hear words that will nurture and enrich, rather than disturb and slow down our quest for harmonious speech.

Compassion

Compassion is a virtue that we should cultivate in our daily life. It brings us happiness. Yet, when people are suffering we feel compassion and it is so painful. Is it possible to be compassionate without suffering the pain of others?

The first thing to remember is that compassion can cause no pain. The compassion that Buddha taught does not cause hurt and has no power

cause pain. If it hurts or causes painful feelings, we would not call it compassion.

True compassion is the positive energy that flows from your heart. When you feel that positive energy you experience comfort, not discomfort. As you express and share that positive energy you bring comfort and healing to the others.



One of the two Hindu temples rebuilt in Kalmunai, Sri Lanka with funds from the Buddhist Maha Vihara Tsunami Relief Fund. The disbursements of relief aid from the Vihara was non-discriminatory and transcends race, religion, creed, nationality, etc in true Buddhist universal love, Metta.

Say for example your friend or family member gets sick or is seriously wounded in an accident, what would be the normal first reaction? It would be to get sad, upset and angry because you don't want them to suffer. Because you now feel their pain, you might say, "I feel compassion for them and it hurts me a great deal."

What you are calling compassion in this situation is actually only the negative reaction to the suffering of another. Negative reaction is usually blind and mechanical and it radiates negative energy. You get sad,

unhappy and disturbed by the pain of others and your mechanical emotional impulses discharge a negative energy. The pain you experience is the result of this. Not the result of compassion.

Many people mistakenly call such negative emotions compassion and then believe that compassion causes our pain.

Please be clear, I am not saying there is something wrong if you react negatively to someone's suffering and find it painful. But I am saying that in Buddhism we simply don't call such negative emotions compassion.

For example, the negative energy that you transmit from your pain is a result of the sadness, grief, and confusion. It can carry no healing potential. But compassion is about sharing healing. It is about sending harmonious energy to the person who is in distress. Sadness carries no healing power. Fear, grief and anger carry no healing power. But your true compassion does.



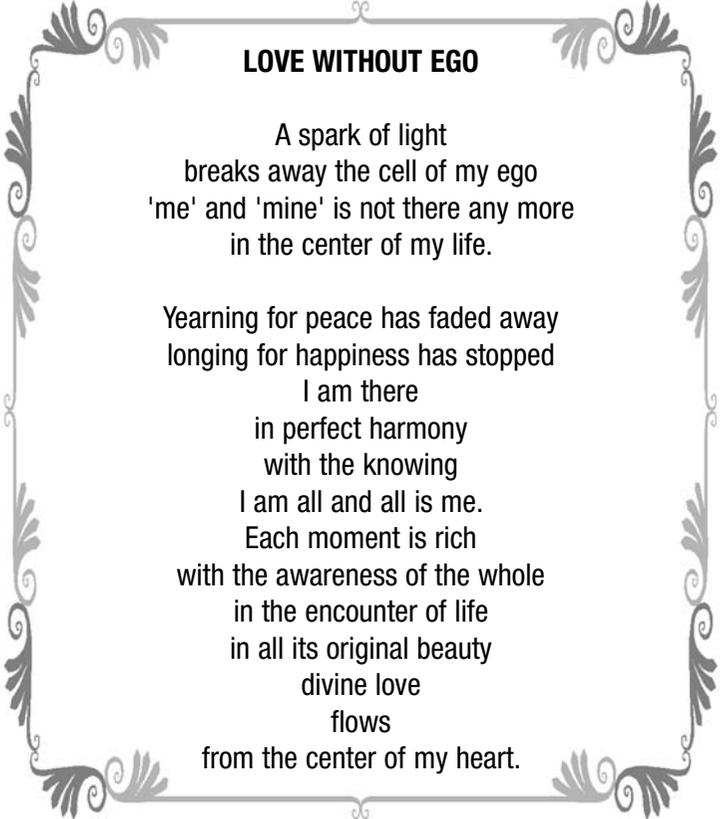
The huge crowd of Tamil children and adults who turned up for the consecration ceremony of the rebuilt Hindu temple in Kalmunai, Sri Lanka with funds from the Buddhist Maha Vihara Tsunami Relief Fund. The Vihara assisted the area through aid channeled via Bhante Wimala for daily camps feeding program, medical aid and rebuilding of 2 Hindu temples. We never attempted to convert anyone in our aid efforts.

Consider another example. You get sick and I come to visit you. I want to share with you positive energy to comfort you and assist your healing. To do that it is essential that I remain positive and peaceful. I know that as soon as I allow your pain to touch and distract me, I cannot radiate the positive healing energy which will bring you comfort. There will not be any space for harmonious peaceful energy of genuine compassion.



The Buddhist Maha Vihara Brickfields holds a Memorial service for the 2004 Asian Tsunami victims annually on December 26. On the third Anniversary of the Tsunami which took the lives of more than 250,000 people, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Datuk Lim Si Cheng officially released the Vihara's Tsunami Relief Fund accounts to the public. The Relief Fund was audited by a public accountant firm and disbursed fully.

I can share with you my sadness, sympathy and let you know that I feel your pain. There is nothing wrong with that. You may even expect it. But the compassion that Buddha taught goes far beyond this. It alone can bring you to a harmonious positive state of mind. Only being apart from, or even better, in the absence of sadness and grief, does genuine compassion flourish.



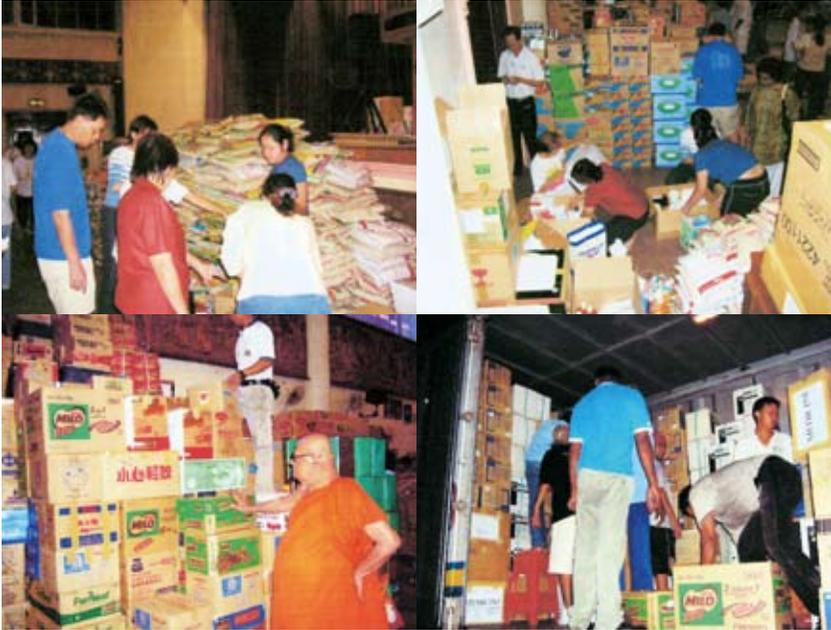
LOVE WITHOUT EGO

A spark of light
breaks away the cell of my ego
'me' and 'mine' is not there any more
in the center of my life.

Yearning for peace has faded away
longing for happiness has stopped
I am there
in perfect harmony
with the knowing
I am all and all is me.
Each moment is rich
with the awareness of the whole
in the encounter of life
in all its original beauty
divine love
flows
from the center of my heart.

If true compassion caused us pain, the great spiritual masters would not have put so much emphasis on cultivating compassion in our hearts. Compassion is always presented as a means of relieving pain and suffering. It would be of questionable value if it also caused, enhanced or nurtured the very thing it proposes to alleviate.

In summary true compassion might be defined as that positive response in us that is inspired by the awareness and thoughtful understanding of the suffering of others. Nowhere in this act of becoming aware of suffering is it necessary that one begin to feel pain. True compassion does not cause you pain. True compassion spurs you to compassion in action. May you continue to be spurred by compassion to act wisely.



Hundreds of volunteers from all walks of life and age and many companies came forward to support the Buddhist Maha Vihara, Brickfields to load more than 45 forty foot container equivalent of Tsunami relief aid by air, sea and land to India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia and Myanmar. Among the relief aid sent were dried food, ready to eat food, body bags, medicines, medical equipments and consumables, clothing, footwear and power generators.

SERVICES AVAILABLE AT THE BUDDHIST MAHA VIHARA

- Booking for Dana (Alms Giving) and Bana (Sermons)
- Blessing Services / Funeral Services by Monks
- Booking of Facilities for religious functions / events
- Marriage Registration
- Full Moon / New Moon Day Puja & Free Vegetarian Lunch
- Sunday Dhamma Classes for Children & Adults
- Buddhist & Pali University Courses
- K Sri Dhammananda Library
- Bookshop
- Kindergarten - Tadika Sudharma
- PARAMA Business & I.T. Training Centre

WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

• Daily Puja		6.30 a.m. & 7.30p.m.
• Choir Practice	Tuesday	8.00p.m.
• Special Talk	Friday	1.00p.m.
• Dhamma Talk	Friday	8.00p.m.
• Meditation	Mon, Tues & Thurs	8.00p.m.
• Bojjhanga Puja	Saturday	7.30p.m. - 8.30p.m.
• Puja & Talk	Sunday	8.30a.m.
• Dhamma School	Sunday	8.30a.m. & 11.30a.m.
• Dharma for the Deaf	Sunday	2.00p.m.

(fortnightly)

DONATION IN CASH OR KIND CAN BE MADE FOR:

- Propagation of Buddhism (Dhammaduta)
- Free Publications (Malaysia and Overseas)
- Education Fund
- Project Buddho Africa
- Full Moon and New Moon services sponsorship
- General Maintenance of the Buddhist Maha Vihara
- Utilities (Electricity, water, telephone, administration etc)
- Illumination (lighting) of the Main Shrine Hall
- Illumination (lighting) of the Awkana Buddha & Cakra
- Monks' Dana
- Monks' Requisites
- Welfare Fund (Malaysia and Overseas)
- Special Religious Events
 - Wesak
 - Annual Blessing Service
 - Annual Merit Offering
 - Kathina Pinkama (ceremony)
 - Monks' Novitiate Programme

MAY THE BLESSINGS OF THE NOBLE TRIPLE GEM

DONATION FORM

Buddhist Maha Vihara
123, Jalan Berhala, Brickfields,
50470 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan,
Malaysia.
Tel: 603-22741141 Fax: 603-22732570

I / We would like to make a donation to the Buddhist Maha Vihara.

Name :

Address :

.....

.....

Amount : RM

Towards : The cost of reprinting this book

Others, please specify

.....

All cheques can made payable to: BUDDHIST MAHA VIHARA or TT to "BUDDHIST MAHA VIHARA" ACCOUNT NO. 0061-10-003018-0, EON BANK BERHAD, BRICKFIELDS, KL. Kindly send us a copy of your BANK SLIP so that we can send you an OFFICIAL RECEIPT.

Bhante Wimala, a Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhist monk visited Malaysia in December 2003 at the invitation of the Buddhist Maha Vihara and the Sri Lanka Buddhist Temple, Sentul for a short Dhammadutta tour.



He has extended the boundaries of his traditional training to bring the wisdom and compassion of the Dhamma across continental, cultural, racial, and socioeconomic divides to inspire thousands of people through his practical spiritual teachings.

He maintains a rigorous travel schedule, dividing his time between teaching, counseling, writing and numerous humanitarian projects. At his home base, in Princeton, New Jersey, Bhante Wimala has established the Triple Gem Society through which his humanitarian projects are organized and funded. Bhante also supervises the Prison Sangha Ministries, currently serving Buddhist inmates in several US institutions.

As the spiritual director of the Nairobi Buddhist Center in Kenya, he coordinates the humanitarian work in East Africa. His projects include medical aid such as distribution of wheel chairs, crutches, prosthetic limbs, mosquito nets, malaria detection kits, and sponsorship of cataract eye operations, distribution of new and used computers to orphanages and hospitals and also providing scholarships to deserving children.

In Europe, Bhante Wimala founded the Lotus Buddhist Center in the Prague, Czech Republic. To accommodate a growing interest in Buddhism, Bhante recently started the Samadhi Buddhist Meditation Center.

***For more information on Bhante Wimala's noble work, visit his Website
www.bhantewimala.com***



Sasana Abhiwurdhi Wardhana Society

Buddhist Maha Vihara

123, Jalan Berhala, Brickfields

50470 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Tel: 603-2274 1141 Fax: 603-2273 2570

E-mail: info@buddhistmahavihara.com

Website: www.buddhistmahavihara.com

www.ksridhammananda.com

ISBN 978-983-2515-31-9



9 789832 515319